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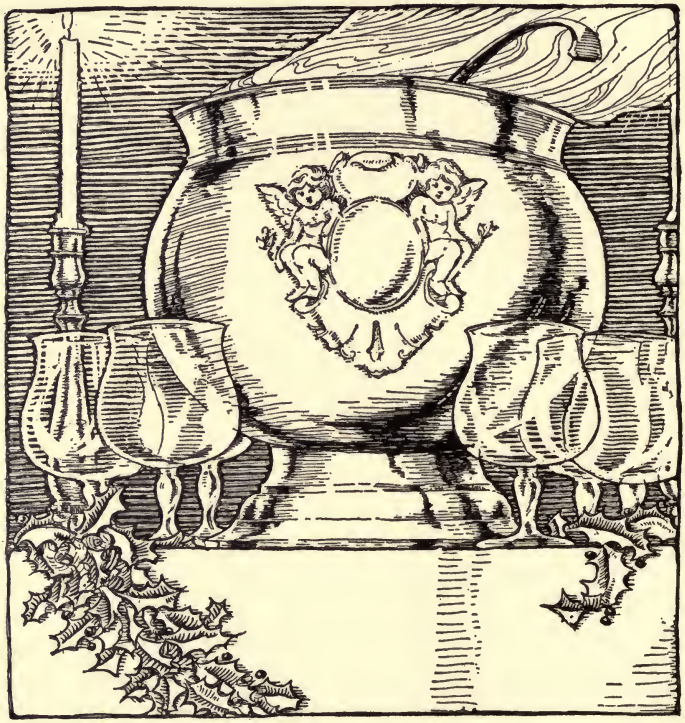
ON LENDING A PUNCH-BOWL



Ye Bowl

ON LENDING A PUNCH-BOWL

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

New York
PRIVATELY PRINTED
CHRISTMAS 1920

WHATEVER we may lack today of the customary gaiety, we still have left our traditions of the Christmastide. No doubt that, for other generations of the children of men, the Punch-bowl and its ceremonials will live in folklore. They are preserved here in Doctor Holmes' ballad; and fancy will readily refill the antique vessel with the old-time brew to cheer our holiday.

And how potent is the delightful potation as ladled out by the amiable Autocrat! Its spirit of good-fellowship still inspires the Season's merry-making. Not so long ago our boys Over There, as those at Bunker's Hill, were cheered and heartened by a draught of it; and if now we must resign ourselves to do without the "generous warmth" and "the banished joys that danced around its brim," we will not forever forego the pleasures of boon companionship, although indeed times change and we with times—save in the ways of friendship. *C. M. F.*

December, 1920.

ON LENDING A PUNCH-BOWL

This ancient silver bowl of mine,—it
tells of good old times,
Of joyous days, and jolly nights, and
merry Christmas chimes;
They were a free and jovial race, but
honest, brave, and true,
That dipped their ladle in the punch
when this old bowl was new.

A Spanish galleon brought the bar,—
so runs the ancient tale;
'T was hammered by an Antwerp smith,
whose arm was like a flail;
And now and then between the strokes,
for fear his strength should fail,
He wiped his brow, and quaffed a cup
of good old Flemish ale.

'T was purchased by an English squire
to please his loving dame,
Who saw the cherubs, and conceived
a longing for the same;
And oft, as on the ancient stock another
twig was found,
'T was filled with caudle spiced and hot,
and handed smoking round.

But, changing hands, it reached at length
a Puritan divine,
Who used to follow Timothy, and take a
little wine,
But hated punch and prelacy; and so it
was, perhaps,
He went to Leyden, where he found
conventicles and schnaps.

And then, of course, you know what 's
next,—it left the Dutchman's shore
With those that in the Mayflower came,—
a hundred souls and more,—
Along with all the furniture, to fill their
new abodes,—
To judge by what is still on hand, at least
a hundred loads.

'Twas on a dreary winter's eve, the night
was closing dim,
When old Miles Standish took the bowl,
and filled it to the brim;
The little Captain stood and stirred the
posset with his sword,
And all his sturdy men-at-arms were
ranged about the board.

He poured the fiery Hollands in,—the
man that never feared,—
He took a long and solemn draught, and
wiped his yellow beard;
And one by one the musketeers—the men
that fought and prayed—
All drank as 't were their mother's milk,
and not a man afraid.

That night, affrighted from his nest, the
screaming eagle flew,
He heard the Pequot's ringing whoop,
the soldier's wild halloo;
And there the sachem learned the rule
he taught to kith and kin,
"Run from the white man when you find
he smells of Hollands gin!"

A hundred years, and fifty more, had
spread their leaves and snows,
A thousand rubs had flattened down each
little cherub's nose,
When once again the bowl was filled, but
not in mirth or joy,
'T was mingled by a mother's hand to
cheer her parting boy.

Drink, John, she said, 't will do you
good,—poor child, you' ll never bear
This working in the dismal trench, out
in the midnight air;
And if—God bless me!—you were hurt,
't would keep away the chill;
So John did drink,—and well he wrought
that night at Bunker's Hill!

I tell you, there was generous warmth in
good old English cheer;
I tell you, 't was a pleasant thought to
bring its symbol here.
'T is but the fool that loves excess;—hast
thou a drunken soul?
Thy bane is in thy shallow skull, not in
my silver bowl!

I love the memory of the past,—its pressed
yet fragrant flowers,—
The moss that clothes its broken walls,—
the ivy on its towers;—
Nay, this poor bauble it bequeathed,—
my eyes grow moist and dim,
To think of all the vanished joys that
danced around its brim.

Of this book three hundred copies were printed for
Thomas Nast Fairbanks by The Marchbanks Press
in December, Nineteen hundred and twenty

PS1959
Q5
1920